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Mary Magdalene and the Disciple Jesus Loved¹

Abstract / Résumé / Zusammenfassung

Die Identität des Johanneischen anonymen Jüngers, den Jesus liebte, ist immer noch rätselhaft. Viele Lösungen sind vorgeschlagen worden, aber keine hat eine generelle Übereinstimmung zur Folge gehabt. Unter anderem sind die Namen verschiedener Männer als mögliche Identifizierungen des anonymen Jüngers genannt worden. Zu diesen Vorschlägen hat R. K. Jusino vor kurzem als erster den Namen einer Frau hinzugefügt: Maria Magdalena. In diesem Artikel unterstütze ich seine These, dass Maria Magdalena eine wichtige Kandidatin sei für die Identifizierung des anonymen Jüngers, den Jesus liebte, aber ich folge einer anderen Argumentation.

In diesem Artikel wird vor allem eine neue Interpretation von Johannes 19,25-27 und 20,1-18 hervorgehoben. Daneben kommen auch das Warum der Anonymität, die damaligen Probleme der Legitimation der Autorität von Frauen ins Blickfeld, sowie repressive Elemente in der Darstellung der Frauen im Johannesevangelium. Die These, dass Maria Magdalena der anonyme Jünger sein könnte, wird zuletzt geprüft an den Kriterien für eine solche Identifizierung, die J.H. Charlesworth in seiner eindrucksvollen Monographie über den geliebten Jünger aufgestellt hat.

Wenn man Maria Magdalena als eine seriöse Kandidatin für die Identifizierung des geliebten Jüngers betrachtet, hat das wichtige Konsequenzen. Sie würde Jünger gehabt haben. Ihre Erzählungen, nicht nur über Jesus' Tod und Auferstehung, sondern auch über sein Leben und seine Unterweisung würden weitergegeben, kanonisiert, gelehrt und verbreitet sein über die ganze Welt.

One of the mysteries of the Gospel of John is the identity of the disciple Jesus loved. Modern exegetes have offered a number of suggestions as to the identity of the tantalizingly anonymous figure: John Mark, John the son of Zebedee, John the Elder, Apollos, Paul, a Paulinist, Benjamin, Judas Iskariot, Philip, Nathanael, Judas Jesus' brother, Matthias, a disciple of the Baptist, Thomas, an Essene monk from Jerusalem, Lazarus, Andrew, or a symbolic figure, representing the Johannine community, the Hellenistic brand of the Church or the ideal Christian disciple.² The historical figures

¹This article has been written as part of my dissertation project 'Reconsidering the Gnostic Mary. Mary Magdalene in the Canonical Gospels and the Gospel of Mary' under the supervision of prof. Dr. C. den Heyer, dr. R. Roukema and dr. C. Vander Stichele. I wish to thank them for their useful commentary and at the same time express my special gratitude to Paula Pumplin for her comments on the English text.

² For various authors and their arguments see Brown 1966, p.xcii-xcviii and especially Charlesworth 1995, p.127-218. The option for Andrew was offered quite recently by Berger 1997, p. 96-109. The

which have been suggested vary widely, but they have one thing in common: they are all men. Only recently has another suggestion been put forward.

Ramon K. Jusino, in his article 'Mary Magdalene: Author of the Fourth Gospel?' argues in favor of the possibility that Mary Magdalene could be the Beloved Disciple of the Gospel of John. In his view, Mary Magdalene, who is called the disciple most loved by Jesus in the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary,³ is in the Gospel of John, after first being mentioned by name, deliberately turned into the anonymous and male Beloved Disciple. In the two instances where Mary Magdalene's name could not be avoided, namely in John 19,25-27 and 20,1-11, the redactor added the Beloved Disciple to make sure that Mary Magdalene and he would be interpreted as two different people.⁴

Jusino suggests, on the basis of the widely respected research of Raymond E. Brown on the Johannine Community,⁵ that this was done as part of a later process.⁶ According to him, the female beloved disciple is made anonymous and male to be acceptable to mainstream ideology. Brown argues that the Johannine community in a very early stage became divided because of a christological argument. The more heterodox believers defended a very high christology, whereas the more orthodox believers wanted to be part of the mainstream emerging Church which defended Jesus' corporeality. To those wanting to take part in the growing institutional Church, Jusino argues, 'the claim that a female disciple of Jesus had been their community's first leader and hero quickly becomes an embarrassment'.⁷ According to him, the other, more heterodox believers of the community held on to their tradition. This is the reason why Mary Magdalene in various heterodox writings appears to be the one loved most by Jesus. Jusino supports his argument by showing where and how the redaction of the text was done. Again, drawing on Brown, he shows that especially in 19,25-27 and 20,1-11, where Mary Magdalene and the male beloved disciple occur

name John comes from Church tradition, the raised Lazarus is proposed because of Jesus' love for him (11,5) and because of the rumour that the disciple Jesus loved would not die (21,23). It has also been suggested that the Beloved Disciple is a redactional fiction which allows the Gospel to be presented as being based on the testimony of an eyewitness. See the survey of Schenke 1986, p.114-119. There are also exegetes who interpret the concept of the Beloved Disciple on a literary level as a character for the reader to identify with. So for instance Watty 1979, p.212: 'As long as the disciple remains unnamed, any disciple, however recent, however late, may be the disciple whom Jesus loved, who reclined on his breast at the Supper and who may be still alive when he comes.' See also Beck 1997, according to whom all John's anonymous characters together form 'an established paradigm of appropriate response to Jesus' (p.144). Schenke 1986, p.120-125, studied Mary Magdalene, James and Judas Thomas in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts, suggesting Judas Thomas to be the Beloved Disciple in John, which Charlesworth in his monograph investigated further.

³ Gospel of Philip 64,1-5; Gospel of Mary 18,14-15.

⁴ Jusino 1998, p.9-18, refers to the inconsistencies most exegetes see in John 19,25-27 and 20,1-11: the sudden presence of the male disciple in 19,26 and the seemingly later inserted text about Peter and the disciple Jesus loved in 20,2-10.

⁵ Brown 1979.

⁶ See Jusino 1998, p.5, where he distinguishes three stages in the process, namely 50-80 A.D.: The community is led by Mary Magdalene; 80-90 A.D.: After the death of Mary Magdalene the community is divided by a christological schism (like Brown distinguishing Secessionists and Apostolic Christians); 90-100 A.D.: one group of the community, fearful of persecution, seeks amalgamation with the emerging institutional Church, the other holds on to the community's tradition and cites Mary Magdalene as the Beloved disciple of Jesus, which is reflected in the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Philip.

⁷ Jusino 1998, p.5.

together, there are inconsistencies in the text, which reveal the hand of a redactor.⁸ In my view, however, there are no significant inconsistencies in these texts. In this article⁹ I want to argue, like Jusino, that Mary Magdalene is concealed in the male anonymous disciple, but, unlike Jusino, my argument does not draw on the Gospel of Mary or the Gospel of Philip nor on Brown's research on the Johannine community. My argument is not one of a redactional nature, revealing a repressive environment from outside, but is rather based on the Gospel of John considered as a meaningful unity.¹⁰ In my view, a repressive atmosphere with regard to women is fundamental to the Gospel of John as a whole, disclosing a repressive environment within the Johannine community, which corresponds to the one outside. This article, however, does not pretend to offer a final solution to the major problem of the identity of the anonymous disciple Jesus loved. It is presented as one possibility among others and is meant to contribute to the on-going debate. Taking into account the numerous and very different scholarly solutions that have been offered this far, one can only conclude that, if, indeed, the Gospel of John wanted the disciple Jesus loved to remain anonymous, at least to outsiders, the author has proved to be very successful.

1. John 19,25-27

The idea, that Mary Magdalene could perhaps be identified as the disciple Jesus loved, first entered my mind, while I was studying John 19,25-27. If one considers this pericope as a meaningful unity,¹¹ the interpretation, which views 19,25 as a parallelism and suggests that two women are standing under the cross, instead of four or three,¹² seems the most logical one, verse 25 introducing what happens in verses

⁸ See note 4.

¹⁰ Hengel 1989, p.83-96, gives a survey of the various scholarly opinions on the unity of the Gospel as a whole, ranging from the view that the unity 'is lost beyond saving' (E. Schwartz) to the view that the Gospel is like the 'seamless robe of Christ' (D.F. Strauss). Hengel himself argues for a 'relative unity' (p. 96-108), since the recently found three Johannine papyri dating from the second century give no evidence of alleged primal forms of the Gospel. A second important argument is the unity in language and style and the coherence of the narrative (he refers to studies of E. Schweizer, E. Ruckstuhl, R. Kieffer, B. Olsson, R.A. Culpepper, G. van Belle). In Hengel's view the Gospel is a 'relative' unity due to the fact that it has been written over a long period of time, based on oral teaching, and that the Gospel was published after the author's death by his pupils. However, behind the Gospel is one dominant creative and theological authority.

¹¹ Exegetes have noted two problems: the difference in the women named in the Gospel of John and those named in the Synoptics, and, compared to 19,25, the sudden presence of the male disciple. Various solutions have been offered, which all presuppose the redaction of the text, and the copying of the list of women from tradition. Brown 1970, p.922 suggests that verse 25 indeed came to the evangelist from tradition, 'but that the reference to the Beloved Disciple, here as elsewhere, is a supplement to the tradition.' In my opinion, if John knew of such a tradition, the view that John felt compelled to copy the list of women is not very convincing, since John did not show the same urge with respect to the tradition of mentioning the names of the Twelve, which the authors of the Synoptics apparently did feel (Mark 3,13-19; Matthew 10,1-4; Luke 6,12-16). John rather shows that the Gospel holds its own views, for instance favouring other disciples than Peter, John and James, which were important according to the Synoptics and Paul. In John Peter clearly plays a less important role, and James and John do not occur at all until perhaps in 21,2 (only very vaguely as 'those of Zebedee'). Instead Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Thomas and Judas (not Iskarioth), play a prominent role (e.g. 1,35-52 and 13,1-14,24).

¹² In this case, Jesus' mother and his mother's sister are understood to be Mary of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. Exegetes today usually opt for four women. Earlier the interpretation which presupposed three women under the cross was popular. For this, see Klauck 1992, p. 2347-2351. Most exegetes mention the option of two women, but do not really discuss the possibility. Klauck 1992, p. 2343-2357

26 and 27. In these latter verses John describes Jesus as seeing two persons: his mother and the disciple he loved. This coincides with the interpretation that John in verse 25 also only means two people: the mother of Jesus, for the first time mentioned here by name as Mary of Clopas now that she is on the verge of losing her identity as a mother, and her sister-in-law or niece, Mary Magdalene. There would have been no one else there. The description of the two women also fits perfectly with a peculiar Johannine trait that William Watty discerned: the Gospel's 'massive effort at precision' when introducing places or persons, not only giving names as such, but also several connections with other places or persons.¹³

So far my main objection against this conjecture was that the disciple Jesus loved in John is obviously grammatically male.¹⁴ But if anonymity in the case of the disciple Jesus loved was so important to the author of John, would indeed the use of masculine gender not guarantee the anonymity in a better way than the use of feminine gender, which would obviously reveal to the readers at least one important feature of the disciple, namely that she is a woman? It also occurred to me that a woman being referred to as male perhaps was not so strange at the time, as it would be to us now. Grace M. Jantzen showed that spirituality in early Christianity gradually became identified with maleness.¹⁵ She gives several examples of the fact that 'women whose spirituality was beyond question were described as honorary males'.¹⁶ She also gives examples of cases of cross-dressing. With regard to Mary Magdalene there is a tradition which speaks of her maleness. In the Gospel of Thomas Jesus promises Peter that he will lead Mary Magdalene in order to make her male 'so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'¹⁷ In the Acts of Philip the Savior praises Mary Magdalene for her manly character. Because of this he gives her the task of joining the weaker Philip on his mission journey. But she is not to join him as a woman. 'As for you, Mary,' he says, 'change your clothing and your outward appearance: reject everything which from the outside suggests a woman.'¹⁸ James H. Charlesworth, in his impressive monograph on the disciple Jesus loved, leaves open the possibility that this figure could be a woman, perhaps Mary, Martha, or Mary Magdalene, in spite of the masculine grammar.¹⁹ For him, the final proof that the disciple must be male, is not the grammar, but the circumstance that the disciple is

finds that the possibility should be taken more seriously. In his view: 'Die nahezu reflexhafte Ablehnung der Zweierlösung ist konditioniert durch das fest umrissene Bild von den Familienverhältnissen Jesu, das wir durch Harmonisierung und Kombination verschiedener Daten gewonnen haben. Auch wenn das Johannesevangelium die einschlägigen synoptischen Stoffe kennen sollte, steht damit immer noch nicht fest, wie es sie selbst verstanden hat und aus seiner Sicht verstanden wissen wollte.' (p.2346)

¹³ Watty 1979, p.209-210 gives numerous examples, e.g. Simon, also named Peter, is the son of John (1,14; 21, 15-17), Philip is of Bethsaida in Galilee, the birthplace also of Andrew and Peter (1,44; 12,21). However, Watty does not mention 19,25. In his view Jesus' mother remains anonymous.

¹⁴ De Boer 1997, p.53.

¹⁵ Jantzen 1995, p.43-58.

¹⁶ Jantzen 1995, p.51.

¹⁷ Gospel of Thomas 114; see Meyer 1985, p.554-570, who comments on this logion and shows, that to castigate femaleness and to recommend the transformation to maleness is by no means rare in the ancient world.

¹⁸ Acts of Philip 77; see Bovon 1984, p.57-58.

¹⁹ Charlesworth 1995, p. xiv gives no arguments why the grammatically male disciple may be female. In about two pages Charlesworth refers to the anonymous disciple as 'he or she'. However, from page xvi onwards, without any comment, the disciple becomes 'he' again.

called 'son'.²⁰ However, John's Jesus does not *address* the disciple as 'son', and uses no other masculine address, which would have completed the parallelism:

He said to his mother:
'Woman, behold your son.'
Then he said to the disciple
'behold your mother.'

By leaving out any masculine address, and by only saying 'Behold your mother', he instead declares the disciple to *represent him as* a son. This kind of *representation* does not necessarily mean that the disciple has to be male. That a woman may fulfill the function of a son to a mother is clear from the story of Ruth and Naomi. The female neighbors praise the way Ruth cared for her mother-in-law, by mentioning her to Naomi as: 'she, who has been more to you than seven sons' (Ruth 4,15). Moreover, in my view the word 'son' in John 19,26 does not in any way primarily refer to the disciple Jesus loved, but rather refers to Jesus himself. For the reader who does not know the flow of the story beforehand, the word 'son' directed to the mother of Jesus designates her own son: the dying crucified Jesus. The reader thoroughly relates with Mary when hearing Jesus' words towards her: 'Woman, behold your son.' It is only after Jesus' words to the disciple 'behold your mother' that the reader suddenly turns to this second person and begins to grasp that Jesus is inviting his mother to understand the meaning of his death and to join his followers. Turning to the disciple Jesus loved, and hearing those words 'behold your mother' the reader is reminded of earlier farewell words of Jesus:

I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has heard my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (14,18-21)

Obviously, after Jesus died, he can be found in those who keep his words and as a consequence are loved by him. His father and he himself will come to them and live in them (14,23).

The ultimate importance of the scene in 19,26-27 lies in Jesus' invitation to his mother to look away from her dying son to find him, alive, in the disciple he loved. At the same time Jesus' words are a solemn declaration to this disciple: he or she may act on Jesus' behalf, as if he or she were Jesus himself. To the reader, who remembers Jesus' prayer to his Father for all those who followed him, and who in their turn will attract new followers - '... that the love with which thou has loved me, may be in them, and I in them...' (17,26) -, the disciple Jesus loved is the first of a vast number of those disciples yet to come.

Both Jesus' mother and the disciple react to Jesus' words. The disciple by taking Jesus' mother to him (or her) and the mother by accepting this. Jesus' words to his mother and the disciple he loved, together with their reaction to them, constitute the beginning of the growing 'koinonia' of those who follow Jesus. In this interpretation

²⁰ Charlesworth 1995, p.5-6. This is after about fifteen pages of silence about the beloved disciple possibly being female.

of 19,26-27 the word 'son' in 19,26 does not say anything about the gender of the disciple Jesus loved. The 'son' is the dying Jesus, who, alive, can be found in the disciple he loved as the one who may represent him.²¹

2. The disciple Jesus loved and John 20,1-18

One can distinguish either five passages about the disciple Jesus loved (13,23-26; 19,26-27; 20,2-10; 21,7.20-24), or six (plus 18,15-16) or seven (plus 1,37-42). The last two passages are about 'another disciple' who, on the basis of 20,2 (interpreted in an explanatory way: 'the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved'), is identified as the disciple Jesus loved.²²

It is important to note, that in John not only one *anonymous* disciple is mentioned as being loved by Jesus. Jesus also loved, for instance, Lazarus, Martha and Mary (11,5). He loved all his disciples, calling them 'his own' (15,9-17; 13,1.34; cf. 17,6-12), even loving those disciples who are yet to come (10,16; 14,21; 17,20-26). Jesus compares 'his own' with sheep who recognize his voice, when he calls them by name, and who are guided by him to seek good pastures (10,1-10). That Mary Magdalene is one of 'his own' emerges from John's story about her in which she recognizes Jesus' voice when he calls her by name, and listens to his words (20,16-18).²³ In addition, she calls him 'Rabbouni', which means 'my teacher' (20,16). Moreover, in 20,2 she does not fetch Peter and 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', but John very precisely describes the disciple being with Peter as 'the *other* disciple Jesus loved'.²⁴ This suggests that either Mary Magdalene or Peter could be the disciple Jesus loved, who is mentioned earlier in 19,25-27. However, in most of the pericopes where John uses the expression, 'the disciple Jesus loved' is in the company of Peter.²⁵ This means that Peter cannot be the one and leaves Mary Magdalene as a serious option.

When Mary Magdalene discovers that Jesus' tomb is empty and she fetches Peter and the 'other disciple Jesus loved', these two run together, the other disciple outrunning Peter. Then Peter looks into the tomb and sees the linen cloth, but the other disciple not only sees, but also believes. After that, they each return to their own home (20,2-10). After the resurrection the disciples join Simon Peter who went fishing. They are Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, those of Zebedee and 'two others of his disciples' (21,2). The disciple Jesus loved recognizes Jesus on the shore and tells Peter about it (21,7). When Jesus later asks Peter to follow him, Peter, turning, sees that the disciple Jesus loved indeed follows (21,20-23). John emphasises that this disciple is the same one who was at Jesus' chest at the last Supper (21,20). In

²¹ As far as I could find, no interpretation of 19,25-27 emphasizes that 'son' in 19,26 may refer to Jesus himself. For a survey of several interpretations of 19,25-27 see Brown 1994, p.1019-1026. They range from the filial duty of Jesus, caring for his mother even at his own crucifixion, to various symbolic interpretations of the Church being born.

²² Brown 1966, p.xciv and Brown 1979, p.31-34, like many exegetes, argues for the latter interpretation. See also Charlesworth 1995, p.326-359. But Charlesworth leaves out 18,15-16. Jusino follows Brown. For most exegetes, including Brown, Charlesworth and Jusino, the expression 'the disciple Jesus loved' has become a title: the Beloved Disciple. I keep to the original expression, since the title does not do enough justice to the narrated anonymity (see also Beck 1997, p.110-111) and since the title, more than the expression, suggests a sense of being loved *most*.

²³ See also Brown 1970, p.1009-1010.

²⁴ The Greek wording is different too: instead of οἱ ἄλλοι it reads here οἱ ἄλλοι ἐκεῖ. This difference is not necessarily of great importance, but it is striking that it occurs exactly here. As far as I know no other author interprets the Greek expression in 20,2 as 'the other disciple Jesus loved'. They all translate: 'the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, ...'

²⁵ John 19,25-27 being the one exception.

my view, John here clarifies the expression ‘the disciple Jesus loved’ as the one who was at Jesus’ chest, because the reference to the other disciple Jesus loved in 20,2 is about another person. Continuing this line of argument it would be highly probable that ‘the disciple Jesus loved’ in 21,7.20-23 together with the ‘other disciple Jesus loved’ in 20,2 are the two unnamed ‘others’ of his disciples in 21,2.²⁶

3. Why this veil of anonymity?

Still, there are other anonymous disciples in John. In 1,37-42 two disciples of John the Baptist decide to follow Jesus: Andrew and another who is left unnamed. In 18,15-16 not only Peter (as in Mark, Matthew and Luke) but also ‘another disciple’ follows Jesus after he has been arrested. This disciple, who is known to the high priest, enters the court, and, after speaking to the maid who keeps the door, the same anonymous disciple brings Peter in. It seems strange that, thereupon, only Peter is asked if he belongs to Jesus’ disciples (18,17.25.26). Why do those present not attack the other disciple as well? Does this mean that the other disciple is not easily to be recognized as disciple?²⁷

Why does John insist on anonymity? Why this veil of mystery? John does not explain this, but at the end of the Gospel it is suggested that there is a ‘we’- an inside group who understands and who knows of the disciple Jesus loved, the one who was at Jesus’ chest, since the author says:

This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. (21,24)

Why is the truthfulness of the testimony emphasized? Why would there be any doubt about the validity of the witness, if he is the person whom scholars up until now have suggested is the disciple Jesus loved? Why would the Gospel not simply mention Andrew, Lazarus, or Thomas, or John Mark, John son of Zebedee or any of the others? We will never know. No reasons are given.²⁸ However, there could have been one very good reason, at least at the time, to question the validity of the witness of the disciple Jesus loved and to hide the disciple’s identity: if this disciple was a woman. I would even suggest that the other anonymous disciples are perhaps left anonymous for the same reason: because they are women.

4. The legitimacy of a woman’s authority

The disciple Jesus loved apparently was very important to those who wrote the Gospel. But, if indeed this disciple was a woman, her authority as the person behind

²⁶ According to Westcott 1902, p.300, the two are disciples in a wider sense than the Twelve. Brown 1970, p.1068, suggests as possible candidates for the two Philip and Andrew (6,7-8; 12,22) or Andrew and Levi (referring to the Gospel of Peter). Schnackenburg 1975, p.419-420, argues that the seven disciples together represent the future Church. The two anonymous disciples allow the inclusion of the disciple Jesus loved. Morris 1995, p.760, concludes that the author has ‘reasons of his own’ not to identify the two.

²⁷ Most authors assume that both cases refer to the Beloved Disciple. Charlesworth 1995, p.326-359, thinks that 1,37-42 does refer to him, but that 18,15-16 might refer to Judas.

²⁸ Beck 1997, p.111-112, gives a survey of some reasons that authors have suggested: the disciple was unknown, or had not enough authority, or the anonymity served as a heightening of the contrast to others, or as a concern for the readers and a possibility to identify.

the writing of John could have been seen as unacceptable, since it was a point of debate if women were allowed to have authority over men.

In several canonical first century letters wives are encouraged to be *submissive* to their husbands, while the husbands are told to *love* their wives (Ephesians 5,21-33; Colossians 3,18-19; 1 Peter 3,1-7). Paul, when demanding that women wear veils when praying or prophesying (1 Corinthians 11,1-16), argues that the reason for this is that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband and the head of Christ is God. However, later in the argument he changes from wives to woman in general, referring to the creation: “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (1 Corinthians 11,8-9) In addition, while 1 Peter 3,1-7 refers to the submissiveness of Sarah to Abraham, in 1 Timothy 2,1-11 the creation analogy is used again: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve,” continuing thus “and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” The author concludes that a woman has to learn with all submissiveness: “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men: she is to keep silent.” This text and the perhaps non-Pauline text in 1 Corinthians 14,34-36 about women who are to keep silent in the assemblies²⁹ were quoted again and again in the centuries that followed to emphasize that women are not allowed to have authority over men.

Schüssler Fiorenza refers to the fourth century *Dialogue Between a Montanist and an Orthodox* which, through means of a discussion between a montanist and an orthodox Christian, shows their respective viewpoints.³⁰ The orthodox viewpoint may reflect a very early stand, since it corresponds to the arguments in the first century letters, which claim that woman is to be submissive to man.

The following quotation from the *Dialogue* comments on women’s authority, concentrating on those women who wrote books, like the second century Montanist prophetesses Prisca and Maximilla:

Orthodox: We do not reject the prophecies of women. Blessed Mary prophesied when she said: “Henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” And as you yourself say, Philip had daughters who prophesied and Mary, the sister of Aaron, prophesied. But we do not permit women to speak in the assemblies, nor to have authority over men, to the point of writing books in their own name: since, such is, indeed, the implication for them of praying with uncovered head (...) Wasn’t Mary, the Mother of God, able to write books in her own name? To avoid dishonoring her head by placing herself above men, she did not do so.

Montanist: Did you say that to pray or to prophesy with uncovered head implies not to write books?

Orthodox: Perfectly.

Montanist: When Blessed Mary says: “Henceforth all generations shall call me blessed,” does she or doesn’t she speak freely and openly?

Orthodox: Since the Gospel is not written in her name, she has a veil in the Evangelist.

²⁹ Verses 33b-36 would have been added around the turn of the century. For extended text critical and literary arguments see Fee 1994, p.272-281.

³⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, p.307-309. She uses the English translation of Gryson 1972, p.129-131. The Greek text was first published by Ficker 1905, p.447-463.

Would a Gospel then, primarily based on the authority of Mary Magdalene be acceptable? Later in the discussion the Montanist asks the following crucial question:

Montanist: Is it because they have written books that you do not receive Prisca and Maximilla?

Orthodox: It is not *only* (italics EAB) for this reason, but also because they were false prophetesses, following their guide Montanus.

Schüssler Fiorenza also refers to the fourth century Didymus the Blind who propounds a similar argument, likewise drawing heavily on the first century letters:³¹

Scripture recognizes as prophetesses the four daughters of Philip, Deborah, Mary, the sister of Aaron, and Mary, the mother of God, who said, as recorded in the Gospel: “Henceforth all women and all generations shall call me blessed.” But in Scripture there are no books written in their name. On the contrary, the Apostle says in First Timothy: “I do not permit women to teach,” and again in First Corinthians: “Every woman who prays or prophesies with uncovered head dishonors her head.” He means that he does not permit a woman to write books impudently, on her own authority, nor to teach in the assemblies, because, by doing so, she offends her head, man: for “the head of woman is man, and the head of man is Christ.” The reason for the silence imposed on women is obvious: woman’s teaching in the beginning caused considerable havoc to the human race; for the apostle writes: “It is not the man who was deceived, but the woman.” (On the Trinity 3.41.3)

When Origen at the end of the second century comments on the verse ‘for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the community’ from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he draws on the same canonical examples of prophesying women, which the disciples of Prisca and Maximilla, he states, use as their argument. Origen argues that, when these biblical figures (the daughters of Philip, Deborah, Mary the sister of Aaron, Hulda, Anne daughter of Phanuel) prophesied, they did not do so in public, since their prophesies are not recorded in Scripture. He refers to 1 Timothy 2,12 and Titus 2,3-5 concluding that a woman is to keep silent, ‘even if she says admirable or holy things’ and he continues ‘however, it comes out of the mouth of a woman.’³² Tertullian, even after he became inclined to Montanism himself, quoted Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians as fervently as he did before. Although in two cases he cites the prophesies of Prisca and Maximilla he still argues that women are not allowed to speak in the assemblies, to teach, to baptize, to serve the eucharist, or to do any task that belong to males. This, he adds, not only applies to married women, but to all women, including the unmarried.³³

Thus, the second century Prisca and Maximilla are not only discussed because of the content of their prophesies, but also because they as women prophesy in public and write books, and as such claim authority over men. Their authority is attacked with quotations from the first century letters. It is striking that Clemens of Alexandria, who clearly defends the equality of men and women, nevertheless, actually does the same. According to him, although men and women have the same nature and are both capable of attaining self control and virtue, their physical differences lead to

³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, p.309. See also Gryson 1972, p.130-131.

³² Gryson 1972, p.56-57. See Jenkins 1909, p.42.

³³ Gryson 1972, p.44. *De virginibus velandis* 9,1

inequality. Quoting Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians he argues that woman must submit to man.³⁴

Apparently there were Christians and Christian communities who would reject a Gospel written by a woman or relying on the authority of a woman. Such a repressive environment might be the reason why, if the theologian behind the Gospel of John was a woman, the author of John choose to give her more than the 'veil' that Luke, according to the orthodox (see the Dialogue), gave Mary the mother of Jesus. The author went to the extent of leaving her anonymous.

5. Repressive elements in John

Jusino declares this to be a later development. A later orthodox redactor would have left out Mary Magdalene's name and would, by his redaction of John 19,25-27 and 20,1-11, purposefully have made it difficult for the readers to identify Mary Magdalene as the beloved one. The repressive environment from outside the Johannine community would have made this necessary. In my view, however, apart from the fact that precisely my interpretation of 19,25-27 and 20,1-18 (based on the text as a meaningful unity) led me to the conjecture that Mary Magdalene could be the disciple Jesus loved, there are also repressive elements in the Gospel of John that reveal a debate about women within the Johannine community itself. There are circumstances related within the Gospel which disclose a caution, a hesitancy, not to be too straightforward about female discipleship.³⁵

In John there are hints of a female awareness of being seen and spoken to primarily as 'woman', or as 'other'³⁶ and being in a suspect situation when acting as a person, without regard for maleness and femaleness (4,27; cf.4,9). The story of the adulteress (8,1-11), although it does not originally belong to the Gospel, reflects the awareness of being vulnerable as a woman at the mercy of male power.³⁷ In addition, it is noteworthy, that the women in John whom Jesus addresses are either his relatives, his mother and Mary Magdalene, or are already acquainted with him, being in the company of a male relative of their own who is Jesus' friend (Martha and Mary as sisters of Lazarus). Only the Samaritan woman is strange to Jesus.³⁸ Moreover, it is striking that the women Jesus relates to in John are in their domestic situations. The Samaritan woman is drawing water near her own town (4,4-42) and Martha and Mary are in their own Bethany, caring for their brother (11,1-44; 12,1-8). In view of this, Mary of Magdala seems to be the exception, appearing rather unexpectedly in

³⁴ Roukema 1996, p.163. *Stromateis* IV,58,2-60,3. Origen quotes Corinthians 11,3.8.11; Ephesians 5,21-25.28-29; Colossians 3,18-4,1

³⁵ This is in contrast to Brown 1975, p. 688-699 (reprinted in Brown 1979, p.183-198); Schneiders 1982, p.35-45; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, p. 323-334; O'Day 1992, p.293-304; Reinhartz 1994, p.561-600 esp. 594-595; who all emphasise John's positive attitude towards women and women's experience and who refer to the theological importance of the women portrayed in the Gospel. Seim 1987, p.56-73 and van Tilborg 1993, p.169-208, for instance, show a more reserved point of view.

³⁶ Seim 1987, p.56-73, rightly draws attention to the instances where John's Jesus addresses women as *gūnai*: 2,4; 4,21; 19,26; 20,13-15 thus emphasising their womanhood and otherness.

³⁷ See Hoskyns 1947, p.563-566, for a detailed text critical and linguistic analysis of this rather early story. In various manuscripts it has been omitted. In others it is found at different places: after Luke 21,38, after John 7,36 or 7,44, or directly after the Gospel of John as a whole. Most commonly, the story is understood to belong in or near John.

³⁸ In the remaining encounter with an unknown woman in 8,1-11, the woman is presented to Jesus by the Pharisees. The contact with Jesus is not her or his initiative.

Jerusalem. However, since Jesus' mother is the only woman clearly mentioned to be travelling with Jesus (2,12), Mary Magdalene as a relative could have joined her.³⁹ This is all very different from the synoptic Gospels, in which Jesus addresses women freely. The synoptic Gospels do not portray them as his relatives or as relatives of male friends. Moreover Mark, Matthew and Luke all speak of 'many women' who followed Jesus, travelling with him and learning from him. According to John, Jesus apparently moves within the boundaries of more conservative attitudes towards women than he does in the synoptic Gospels. With regard to this it is important to note, that in John there is a certain ambiguity towards women on the part of the disciples and Jesus. In the story about Jesus and the Samaritan woman there is a hesitancy on the part of Jesus. Jesus, weary from his journey, sitting down beside the well, asks only for water, with as few words as possible, and even omits *guñai* from his address.⁴⁰ The woman thereupon starts the dialogue.⁴¹ However, when she asks to be given the living water, Jesus wants her to fetch her husband (4,16), but she appears to be a woman on her own. The disciples, returning from their shopping, marvel in turn that Jesus is talking with a woman (4,27). In a way the story builds up like the story of the Syrophenician woman in Mark and Matthew: not only the Samaritan woman, but also Jesus is learning, and so are the disciples and the readers. The story as a whole illustrates that, although it may seem strange, women appear to be able to be partners in theological discourse, capable of 'leaving everything behind', and of having their share in mission (quite successfully too), even on their own initiative as their response to Jesus' self revelation that he is the Messiah. The story as a whole also shows that Jesus himself becomes aware that women may be sowers of the seed like he, and that the disciples need not be afraid, or need not stop them, but may rejoice with them, reaping the harvest (4,27-38).

6. John's careful approach

Apparently there is a repressive environment, not only from outside the Johannine community, but also from within, from John's Jesus and his disciples who approach women carefully. Within these conservative boundaries, however, portraying women in their domestic situations, or as belonging to Jesus' relatives, there is at the same time in John a clear display of female self consciousness: not only in general, but also

³⁹ We may visualize her among the *oi (a)dei fōi* when we do not interpret the word as brothers and sisters, but in the wider sense as relatives (2,12).

⁴⁰ Jesus only says three short words: *doñ moi peiñ*. Ilan 1995, p.126-127 refers to Rabbinic sayings against talking to women. Women outside the circle of family and friends should especially be addressed as briefly as possible.

⁴¹ I do not agree with Seim 1987, p.59, who argues that Jesus takes the initiative. Ilan 1995, p.127, in her survey of examples of Rabbinic sayings about refraining from talking to women, refers to a 'Beruriah' passage, which is quite interesting with regard to our story: 'R. Yose the Galilean was once on a journey when he met Beruriah. By what road, he asked her, do we go to Lod? Galilean fool, she replied, did not the sages say this 'Talk not much with womankind?' You should have asked: By which to Lod? (bErub.53b)' Ilan comments that R. Yose, ironically, already avoiding all polite formality, is now drawn against his own will into a conversation by a *woman* exactly about how to address women to avoid conversation with them. In my view quite the same happens to Jesus. He uses only the words he really needs, thus avoiding conversation with the woman, but she finds enough reason to question him about them. The great difference between the Beruriah story and the one about Jesus and the Samaritan woman is, that the Samaritan woman does not linger on the behaviour of males towards females, like Beruriah, but focuses on the behaviour of Jews towards Samaritans. Whereas Jesus by his attitude reveals that he is very conscious of his maleness and her femaleness, the Samaritan woman is more concerned by the fact that he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan.

with regard to female discipleship. John portrays women as speaking far more than Mark, Matthew and Luke. In Mark only five instances of women speaking are recorded,⁴² in Matthew women speak nine times⁴³ and in Luke eleven times,⁴⁴ only four of which occur in stories about Jesus as a grown man.⁴⁵ In contrast to the Synoptics, John records 22 instances of women speaking.⁴⁶

When one considers the words of women spoken in dialogue with Jesus the difference is even more obvious. In Mark and Matthew only the Syrophenician woman speaks with Jesus (one time in Mark; three times in Matthew),⁴⁷ and in Luke only his mother, Martha and the woman from the crowd (each one time).⁴⁸ In John, however, all the women, except the doorkeeper of the court of the high Priest, are portrayed in a self-conscious dialogue with Jesus: his mother speaks one time, the Samaritan woman six times, Martha and Mary together one time, Martha alone four times, her sister Mary one time, and Mary Magdalene two times.⁴⁹

The other seven times women speak are in a self-conscious context too. The mother of Jesus, at the wedding of Cana, tells the servants to do whatever Jesus asks them to do (2.5). The Samaritan woman leaves everything behind to evangelize the citizens of her hometown Sychar (4,29.39). Martha calls her sister Mary unto Jesus, as Andrew called his brother Simon Peter and Philip called Nathanael. It is strikingly different, however, that her call is said to be in secret. After she confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world (the confession which Mark, Matthew and Luke reserve for Peter), John relates:

When she had said this, she went and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Teacher is here and is calling for you. (11,28)⁵⁰

In response to Martha's call, Mary rises quickly to come unto him. The woman doorkeeper at the court of the high Priest takes the initiative of identifying Peter to be one of Jesus' disciples (18,17). Last but not least, Mary Magdalene summons Peter and the other disciple Jesus loved to come to the empty tomb (20,2), where she, after they have gone, addresses the angels to find out where Jesus' body has been taken (20,13).

Women are clearly portrayed in discipleship *roles*, learning from Jesus, seeking to understand, confessing him, summoning others and evangelizing, but they are indeed never called *disciples*. Although the marks of Johannine discipleship, – 'if you continue in my word' (8,31), 'if you have love for one another' (13,35), and if 'you bear much fruit' (15,8) – are clearly not exclusive, the word 'disciple', when used, is connected with male names or male figures only.⁵¹ Even though the Samaritan

⁴² Mark 5,28; 7,28; 14,67.69; 16,3.

⁴³ Matthew 14,8; 15,22.26.27; 25,8.9.11; 26,69.71.

⁴⁴ Luke 1,25.34.38.42-45.46-55.60; 2,48;10,40; 11,27;18,3; 22,56.

⁴⁵ Luke 10,40; 11,27;18,3; 22,56

⁴⁶ John 2,3.5; 4,9.11-12.15.17.19-20.25.29.39; 11,3.21-22.24.27.28.32.39; 18,17; 20,2.13.15.16

⁴⁷ Mark 7,28; Matthew 15,22.26.27. While she is rather bold, Jesus praises her faith in both Mark and Matthew.

⁴⁸ Jesus rebukes all three of them (Luke 2,48-49;10,40-42; 11,27-28).

⁴⁹ 2.3; 4,9.11-12.15.17.19-20.25; 11,3.21-22.24.27.32.39; 20,15.16

⁵⁰ The Revised Standard Version has: '(...) called her sister Mary, saying quietly (...)'

⁵¹ Andrew (6,8); the Twelve (6,67); Thomas (11,16); the blind man and the Pharisees (9,13-29); Judas Iskariot (12,4); Simon Peter, Thomas, Philip, Judas not Iskariot (13,1-17,16); Josef of Arimathea (19,35); Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanaël, the sons of Zebedee (21,1-2) . Whereas Thomas in 11,16 talks to his 'co-disciples' and in 20,24-25 is compared to the 'other disciples', Mary Magdalene in 20,18 goes to 'the disciples'. The 'other disciple' in 20,2.4 may be interpreted as co-disciple of Mary

woman bears much fruit, even though Mary shows her love, and even though Jesus' mother, Martha and Mary Magdalene continue in Jesus' word. The repressive environment with regard to women, not only from outside, but also from within the Johannine community, could be the reason why, if the disciple Jesus loved is a woman, the Gospel could have chosen to leave her anonymous, making her male, and to refrain from actually calling women *disciples*. This could perhaps also be the reason why John does not mention the 'many women' who, according to the Synoptics, followed Jesus. Or should we assume that this feature of tradition was unknown to John?

If the author wants *the close readers* to discover that the anonymous disciples are female, then Mary Magdalene being the anonymous beloved disciple is one of the hints that women are included in the grammatically masculine group of John's disciples. The other hint is the fact that the disciples in 20,17-18 are to understand that, from that moment on, Jesus' Father is their Father. In 1,12 John proclaims that this applies to all who received Jesus, who believed in his name, Jesus giving them the power to become children of God. Here indeed John uses the inclusive word *tekna*. However, *on the surface of the story* no mention is made of women disciples having actually traveled with Jesus.

John thus presents women in a very careful manner: portraying them in discipleship roles in domestic situations, or, outside domestic situations, as belonging to Jesus' relatives. Within these boundaries, however, John allows them self-conscious and theologically relevant dialogue with Jesus. The Gospel apparently chose not to confuse or to offend its readers, to arouse suspicions or to strengthen prejudices, by explicitly identifying the witness behind the Gospel as female and by unreservedly presenting female disciples. Instead, it chose to leave both anonymous, making them male, in order to be able to present the thoughts and stories of Mary Magdalene, as the one behind the Gospel, in an acceptable manner.

7. Charlesworth's eight criteria

Charlesworth, on the basis of a detailed exegesis of the passages in which the disciple Jesus loved occurs, developed eight criteria to judge the various attempts to identify this person.⁵²

1. the love Jesus felt for the disciple must be demonstrable,
2. a clear reason for the anonymity must be given,
3. the closeness of exactly this disciple to Jesus, and his or her authority over the others, should be adequately explained,
4. an explanation is needed for the fact that the disciple occurs relatively late in the Gospel,
5. an explanation must be given for the scene at the cross,
6. the emphasis of the validity of the testimony should be explained,
7. the fear, that is caused by the prospect of the death of the disciple, must be explained,
8. and the almost polemic rivalry between the disciple and Peter should be clarified.

We will test all these criteria on Mary Magdalene.

As we have seen Jesus loved all his disciples, calling them 'his own', being those who recognize his voice when he calls them by name, and who listen to his words. In

Magdalene, but John gives the readers ample opportunity to overlook this and to interpret the 'other disciple' as co-disciple of Peter.

⁵² Charlesworth 1995, p.xiv-xviii and p.428-431.

John's story about Mary Magdalene she indeed recognizes his voice, when Jesus calls her by name, and she listens to his words, going to the disciples, saying what he asked her to say (20,16.18). This would suggest that Mary Magdalene is one of Jesus' own and that she thus, implicitly, is a disciple, loved by him. Also the three criteria of Johannine discipleship apply to her. She continues in Jesus' words (20, cf. 8,31), she shows love to the mother of Jesus (19,27; cf. 13,35), and as witness to the significance of the resurrection (20,17; cf. 1,12), she bears much fruit (15,8).

The anonymity of Mary Magdalene as the disciple Jesus loved, the second criterion, as we argued earlier, may be explained by the fact that she is a female disciple. Testimony from a female disciple would have been difficult to accept, not only for those outside the Johannine community, but, as we have shown, also for the Johannine community itself.

Mary Magdalene's special authority (the third criterion) is evident from the fact that she is the only witness to the precise meaning of Jesus' resurrection, which Jesus reveals only to her. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene alone before ascending to his Father. She alone is the witness and proclaimer of the new bond Jesus initiates at that very moment: 'my Father – your Father, my God – your God' (20,17). Jesus urges her to go and tell this to his brothers and sisters. Mary Magdalene interprets this request in her own way and does not go to Jesus' relatives, but to the disciples. Already at the Last Supper Jesus said to his disciples, his 'own' (13,1), as such also Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary and perhaps other women too, that he would no longer call them slaves, but friends, since he had revealed everything to them (15,15), but now they have become his brothers and sisters, he and they are all children of the one Father. The reader understands that Mary Magdalene's interpretation has become authoritative to the Johannine community, since it is the crucial message of the Gospel, formulated in the prologue, which says that Jesus indeed has come, so that all those who accept him, who believe in his name, will receive from him the strength to become children of God, by being born anew (1,12-13).⁵³ This will be done through the Spirit (3,5), Jesus' ascension to the Father making the gift of the Spirit finally possible (16,5-7).⁵⁴

But how should we explain Mary Magdalene's closeness to Jesus at the Last Supper (the second clause of the third criterion), where she is 'reclining on Jesus' bosom', which means sitting / lying next to him, Peter motioning to her to ask of Jesus who will betray him? Why this special position? On the one hand this could be explained by the circumstance that she, according to John, is close family, the niece or the sister in law of his mother (19,25-26). In contrast to the Synoptics, Jesus' relatives do have a role in John. His mother urges him to interfere at the wedding in Cana and his brothers and sisters, when he is in Galilee losing many disciples (6,66), rather cynically urge him to go to his disciples in Judea (7,1-9). When in 2,12 the train of his followers is described, his mother is mentioned first, then his brothers and sisters and, finally, his disciples (2,12). The 'reclining on Jesus bosom' also has a metaphorical meaning. The metaphor of the bosom in Judaism symbolizes the handing over of authoritative tradition.⁵⁵ The disciple Jesus loved being at Jesus' bosom represents

⁵³ Here indeed the inclusive word *tekna* has been used and not the more masculine word *uiōi* Matthew used in Matthew 5,9.45.

⁵⁴ See also Brown 1970, 1014-1017.

⁵⁵ Berger 1997, p.99.109. See also van Tilborg 1993, p.77-91, who refers to the use of the word in the Septuagint, where it denotes marital sexual relations between man and woman and the protective love for a child in the womb of its mother. The latter would be the case here. In Hellenism a 'favourite pupil' was quite common. Van Tilborg gives examples of favourites who indeed succeeded their

the receiving of tradition and authority especially now, when Jesus' end is near. If indeed there are two women under the cross and the disciple Jesus loved is one of them, Mary Magdalene is this disciple to whom Jesus refers his mother, as the one in whom he himself can be found, declaring this disciple to be the one who may represent him (19,25-27).

Why does the disciple Jesus loved, if she is to be identified as Mary Magdalene, occur so late in the Gospel? That is the fourth question that according to Charlesworth is to be answered. Indeed, John introduces the expression 'the disciple Jesus loved' relatively late in 13,23. This might be because chapter 13 forms the beginning of the farewell discourse which ends in chapter 17. Jesus as the one loved by God, now passes his authoritative knowledge on to the one loved by him. The anonymous disciple may already have been present right from the start as Jesus' first disciple in 1,35, a former disciple of John the Baptist.⁵⁶ According to Brown the anonymous disciple is distinguished as the loved one at the Last Supper and not earlier, since only in this christological context of 'the hour', the identity as the loved one, close to Jesus, plays a role.⁵⁷ This coincides with the fact that in Mark and Matthew Mary Magdalene is also anonymously present from Galilee onwards, being specifically mentioned only late in the Gospel story, at the time of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Even in Luke, although her name is mentioned earlier, she only plays her part at the end of the Gospel.

An explanation of the scene at the cross, the fifth criterion of Charlesworth, has already partly been given. Jesus solemnly declares Mary Magdalene to represent him and to act on his behalf, while he invites his mother to find him in her. By reacting positively to this, together they represent the growing 'koinonia' of those who follow Jesus in the near and distant future. Yet something else happens after Jesus has died. His side is pierced by a spear and a testimony about this is recorded by an eyewitness. This is the second half of Charlesworth's fifth criterion. Why could this witness be Mary Magdalene?

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus to the house of Caiaphas, where Peter publicly denied being a disciple of Jesus. After this, Jesus is led to the Praetorium and we hear nothing of Peter until the day Jesus' tomb is found empty. At the crucifixion in John, as in Mark, Matthew and Luke, no known male disciples are mentioned as being present (cf. 16,32; 18,8; 20,19). In John the anonymous 'other disciple' from 18,15-16 seems the one who remains, appearing again as the disciple Jesus loved beneath the cross: Mary Magdalene. This person 'whose testimony should not be doubted' is the same as the one who witnesses the side of Jesus being pierced with a spear: 'and at once there came out blood and water'. John adds:

He who saw it has borne witness - his testimony is true, and he knows and tells the truth - that you also may believe.(19,36)

teachers. According to him the love of Jesus for the anonymous disciple reflects the love of the Father for Jesus.

⁵⁶ Brown 1979, p.33 argues that the disciple Jesus loved is a former disciple of John the Baptist. In his view the disciple in 1,35-40 is not called the disciple Jesus loved, since in the beginning of the Gospel story he has not yet achieved this closeness to Jesus.

⁵⁷ Brown 1979, p.33, states: 'During his lifetime (...) the Beloved Disciple lived through the same growth in christological perception that the Johannine community went through, and it was this growth that made it possible for the community to identify him as the one whom Jesus particularly loved.'

Thus Mary Magdalene, as the disciple Jesus loved and the only mentioned disciple still present is the one who bore witness to this. First to the fact that Jesus really died and secondly to the insight that Jesus' death indeed procured not only blood, as a symbol of his gift of love (cf. 10,11-15) but also water, as a symbol of the holy Ghost (cf. 1 John 5,6-8).⁵⁸ Where Mary Magdalene in the synoptic Gospels is witness to the fact that Jesus is really buried, here she is witness to the meaning of his death. In the same way John presents her as the key witness to the precise meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

Testing Mary Magdalene against Charlesworth's sixth criterion we are to explain why the validity of her testimony should be emphasized. As we already suggested, this emphasis is due to the fact that at least the we-group knows that the disciple Jesus loved is a woman. The repressive attitude towards women claiming authority, not only from outside, but also from within the Johannine community, shows that especially the testimony of a woman could have been easily doubted or rejected. Charlesworth's seventh criterion is based on his interpretation of 21,21-23. He suggests that the community feared the death of the disciple Jesus loved. Apparently there circulated a rumor, which had its origin in what Jesus himself said, that the disciple he loved would not die (21,21-23). The community, who found its identity in the testimony of the disciple Jesus loved, could have feared the death of Mary Magdalene (or could have been traumatized by the death of Mary Magdalene), since she is the only one to whom Jesus revealed the precise meaning of his resurrection. She is the only witness of the new bond Jesus proclaimed at that very moment. As appears from the prologue her testimony to this bond and her interpretation of it became vital to the creed of the community (1,12).

Concerning the eighth criterion we have to remember that we choose to interpret the other disciple that outruns Peter as another (female) disciple (perhaps to symbolize the gender-difficulties in the community?), rather than the disciple Jesus loved who stood beneath the cross. Charlesworth's idea that any rivalry between Peter and the disciple Jesus loved exists derives for the most part from the disciple outrunning Peter. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Peter recognizes the fact that the disciple Jesus loved is closer to Jesus than he himself (13,23-24 and 21,7.20-23). In the Synoptics there is no disciple closer to Jesus than Peter. In the later non-canonical sources, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary and Pistis Sophia, Peter and Mary Magdalene appear together, Peter denying rather than recognizing Mary Magdalene's closeness to Jesus.⁵⁹ In these writings Mary Magdalene indeed has a special position. In the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary she is the only person to whom the other disciples refer to as the one loved by Jesus more than the others and as the one who has a greater insight.⁶⁰ In the Gospel of John the two are held in balance, Peter receiving the authority to care for Jesus' followers in a pastoral way (21,15-19),⁶¹ whereas Mary Magdalene receives and understands the crucial message of the Gospel (20,17; cf. 1,12).

8. Conclusion

⁵⁸ For a survey of several interpretations see Brown 1970, p.946-956.

⁵⁹ Gospel of Thomas log 114; Gospel of Mary 17,16-23; Pistis Sophia 36.72

⁶⁰ Gospel of Philip 64,1-5; Gospel of Mary 18,14-15

⁶¹ This is very different from Matthew's view on Peter, who is, according to this Gospel, the rock on which the Church is to be built and the one who receives the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16,18-20).

Primarily on the basis of John 19,25-17 and 20,1-18 , but also on the basis of John's caution concerning female discipleship, on the basis of the repressive elements within and without the Johannine community when the authority of women is at stake, and on the basis of Charlesworth's eight criteria, I conclude that Mary Magdalene should be seen as a serious candidate for the identification of the anonymous disciple Jesus loved in the Gospel of John.

If we indeed look upon her as an important candidate, this has consequences for our general perspective on Mary Magdalene. She would have had disciples, her testimony would have formed a community, her accounts not only of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also of his life and teachings, would have been preserved. But not only that, her words would have been canonized and taught through the ages, and spread over the world.

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